

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 0856
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THE FOLLOWING TELEGRAM WAS SENT ACTION NEW DELHI 12 APR 1978
AND IS REPEATED FOR YOUR ACTION/INFORMATION.

QUOTE:

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PINT, IN
SUBJECT: VIOLENCE BREAKS OUT AGAIN IN SOUTH INDIA

1. FOR THE SECOND TIME IN AS MANY WEEKS POLICE HAVE FIRED
ON CROWDS OF SOUTH INDIAN DEMONSTRATORS. AFTER A WEEK OF VIOLENCE
IN HYDERABAD, POLICE OPENED FIRE APRIL 9 ON A CROWD OF 5000 ANGRY
FARMERS NEAR MADURAI IN TAMIL NADU, KILLING FIVE AND INJURING
SIX OTHERS. ON APRIL 10 AND 11 POLICE FIRED AGAIN ON SIMILAR CROWDS
KILLING TWO AND INJURING SEVERAL OTHERS.

2. THE VIOLENCE IN TAMIL NADU BEGAN APRIL 7 AFTER AN AGRICULTURA-
LISTS ASSOCIATION LED BY G. NARAYANASWAMY NAIDU WAS DENIED PERMISSION
TO STAGE A LARGE SCALE DEMONSTRATION IN MADRAS, WITH THE AVOWED AIM
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OF BLOCKING ROADS INTO THE CITY. THE FARMERS' ORGANIZATION WANTED
TO PROTEST A LARGE NUMBER OF RURAL POWER CUTOFFS FOR NONPAYMENT OF
BILLS AND FORCED COLLECTIONS OF OVERDUE LOANS. THE GROUP ALSO
RESTATED LONG STANDING DEMANDS FOR LOWER ELECTRICITY RATES, SUBSIDIES
,
AND DEBT RELIEF.

3. ON APRIL 6 FARMERS IN NORTH ARCOT DISTRICT ORGANIZED DEMONSTRATIONS PROTESTING THE DENIAL OF PERMISSION TO HOLD THE PROTEST. AFTER 100 OF THE ORGANIZATION'S LEADERS WERE PUT IN PREVENTIVE DETENTION TO CALM THE SITUATION THE DEMONSTRATORS TURNED VIOLENT, PROTESTING THEIR LEADERS' ARREST. ON APRIL 7 THEY SET UP ROAD BLOCKS WITH TREES, BULLOCK CARTS AND BOULDERS AND TRIED TO PREVENT POLICE FROM TEARING THEM DOWN. SEVERAL DOZEN POLICEMEN WERE INJURED AND POLICE USED TEAR GAS AND BATON CHARGES TO BREAK UP THE CROWDS.

4. THE DEMONSTRATIONS QUICKLY SPREAD TO NEARBY DISTRICTS. THE LEVEL OF VIOLENCE ESCALATED UNTIL POLICE OPENED FIRE APRIL 9 ON A CROWD NEAR MADURAI TRYING TO STOP THEM FROM CLEARING ANOTHER ROAD BLOCK. POLICE FIRED AGAIN ON A CROWD NEAR DINDIGUL APRIL 10 KILLING ONE AND INJURING ONE MORE. PROTESTERS WERE ACTIVE IN SEVERAL OTHER AREAS AS WELL, SETTING UP MORE ROADBLOCKS, BURNING BUSES AND BLOWING UP A BRIDGE AND SEVERAL CULVERTS. A COIMBATORE CITY BANDH CALLED FOR APRIL 10 TO PROTEST THE APRIL 9 POLICE FIRING APPE-

ARES TO HAVE MET WITH NO SUCCESS, HOWEVER, LEADING OBSERVERS TO BELIEVE THE PROTESTERS HAVE NO URBAN SYMPATHY. (THERE HAS BEEN NO ACTIVITY IN MADRAS, EITHER.)

5. THE GOTNRESPONDED QUICKLY TO THE GROWING VIOLENCE BY PUTTING ARMY UNITS ON A STANDBY BASIS IN THE AFFECTED AREA AND BRINGING IN LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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ADDITIONAL POLICE FROM KARNATAKA, IN A PUBLIC STATEMENT RELEASED LATE APRIL 10, CHIEF MINISTER M. G. RAMACHANDRAN SAID THAT THE VIOLENCE WAS PART OF A "PRE-PLANNED CONSPIRACY" TO CREATE ANARCHY IN THE STATE. HE REGRETTED THE POLICE FIRINGS BUT ADDED THAT SINCE THE POLICE HAD BEEN ATTACKED WHILE TRYING TO MAINTAIN LAW AND ORDER THE FIRINGS WERE "UNFORTUNATE BUT INEVITABLE." HE ALSO SAID THAT THE GOVERNMENT WAS DETERMINED TO PUT DOWN THE VIOLENCE AND DISORDER.

6. ON APRIL 11 POLICE FIRED ON A CROWD OF FARMERS IN NORTH ARCOT DISTRICT, KILLING ONE AND INJURING AN UNKNOWN NUMBER. NEWS REPORTS INDICATE, HOWEVER, THAT EXCEPT FOR THIS INCIDENT THE REST OF THE AFFECTED AREAS WAS GENERALLY QUIET AND BLOCKED ROAD AND RAIL LINKS WERE BEING REOPENED.

7. ALTHOUGH MGR DID NOT SPECIFY WHO WAS BEHIND THE CONSPIRACY, OTHER CABINET MINISTERS HAVE BEGUN MAKING CHARGES. SEVERAL MINISTERS HAVE ACCUSED "A PARTY" WHILE ONE HAS OPENLY BLAMED THE DMK. DMK LEADER M. KARUNANIDHI DENIED THE CHARGE BUT DID SAY HE WAS SYMPATHETIC TO THE FARMERS' AIMS. HIS FEELINGS WERE ECHOED BY O. V. ALAGESAN, HEAD OF THE TNCC.

8. COMMENT: MOST OBSERVERS BELIEVE THE ROADBLOCKS AND SABOTAGE ARE TOO WELL ORGANIZED TO BE SPONTANEOUS. MANY DO NOT BELIEVE THE IMMEDIATE ISSUES WERE SERIOUS ENOUGH TO BRING FARMERS OUT ON THEIR OWN. HOWEVER THE ARREST OF THEIR LEADERS AND THE POLICE FIRINGS THEMSELVES APPEAR TO HAVE PROVOKED FARMERS TO TAKE TO THE STREETS.

NAIDU'S ORGANIZATION IS THE ONLY FARMERS' GROUP SO FAR OPENLY INVOLVED AND OTHERS, INCLUDING THOSE LED BY THE JANATA AND CONGRESS (I) HAVE NOT SO FAR JOINED THE DEMONSTRATIONS. ALTHOUGH NAIDU'S GROUP RESIGNED BEFORE THE PROTESTS FROM A "HIGH POWERED" GOTN COMMISSION INVESTIGATING FARMERS' PROBLEMS, OTHER OPPOSITION-LED AGRICULTURALIST ASSOCIATIONS HAVE REMAINED ON THE PANEL. NAIDU

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FOLLOWER OF THE LATE CONGRESS (O) LEADER, K. KAMARAJ, AND IS NOT KNOWN TO HAVE DMK SYMPATHIES. HOWEVER MANY INSIDE AND OUTSIDE GOVERNMENT BELIEVE SOME POLITICIANS HAVE TAKEN ADVANTAGE OF THE ORIGINAL INCIDENTS TO ESCALATE THE SITUATION. SOME BELIEVE NAXALITE ELEMENTS ARE INVOLVED, BUT NO GOVERNMENT OFFICIAL HAS YET PUBLICLY USED ANY TERM STRONGER THAN "ANTI-SOCIAL ELEMENT." AT THE MOMENT THE GOTN APPEARS TO HOPE THAT A MASSIVE SHOW OF FORCE WILL SUPPRESS THE VIOLENCE AND ALLOW TENSIONS TO EASE. END COMMENT.

9. THERE IS NO EVIDENCE SO FAR TO SHOW ANY CONNECTION BETWEEN THE VIOLENCE IN TAMIL NADU AND THE INCIDENTS IN HYDERABAD APRIL 1-5. A CONGEN OFFICER VISITED HYDERABAD APRIL 7 AND FOUND THE CITY NORMAL, WITH SHOPS, SCHOOLS AND OFFICES OPEN AND PUBLIC AND PRIVATE TRANSPORT OPERATING AS USUAL. WHAT PROPERTY HAD BEEN DAMAGED HAD APPARENTLY ALREADY BEEN REMOVED OR CLEANED UP, AND THE ONLY REMINDER THAT ANYTHING UNUSUAL HAD TAKEN PLACE WERE SEVERAL SQUADS OF CENTRAL RESERVE POLICE STILL ON DUTY. ALTHOUGH CHIEF MINISTER M. CHENNA REDDY BLAMED NAXALITES FOR THE RIOTING IN HIS STATE, HE DID NOT NEGOTIATE WITH THEM BUT WITH THE JANATA, CONGRESS AND (MUSLIM) MAJLIS PARTIES. AFTER THESE GROUPS REACHED AN AGREEMENT WITH HIM THEY CALLED OFF THE AGITATION AND IT STOPPED IMMEDIATELY. THE CONGEN OFFICER FOUND A WIDESPREAD FEELING THAT THE OPPOSITION PARTIES USED THE ORIGINAL INCIDENT TO SERVE NOTICE ON THE CHIEF MINISTER'S NEW GOVERNMENT THAT THEY ARE A FORCE HE MUST RECKON WITH, EVEN IN HIS HOME TERRITORY. MCCASKILL UNQUOTE
GOHEEN

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